DECISION MEMO
Big Basin Spur Roads Decommissioning

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
Lochsa-Powell Ranger District
Idaho County, Idaho

I. Introduction

I have decided to approve decommissioning up to 5.6 miles of non-system, harvest legacy roads on the Nez-Perce-Clearwater National Forests, Idaho County, Idaho. The project is located in Township 37 North, Range 15 East, Section 18, Boise Meridian. (See attached map).

II. Purpose and Need

This project is a continuation of and adjacent to the South Brushy Fork (2016) and Brushy Fork Face (2017) Road Decommissioning projects in the 'checkerboard' part of the Forest. 'Big Basin Spur' consists of jammer logging road systems built in the mid-1950s. Typical of that era, the low volume roads were built to minimum haul specs and with log culverts at stream crossings.

The primary objective for the project is to reduce watershed impacts by reclaiming roads no longer necessary for and were never part of the Forest's transportation system. Many of the roads have been identified as currently causing chronic erosion into streams due to slumping fill slopes and saturated areas, and log or metal culverts plugged or failing. In addition, most of the roads proposed for decommissioning are on dissected Breaklands land types, with some on mass wasting land types, both subject to landslides. As such, the roads have a high potential to catastrophically deposit large amounts of sediment into fish bearing streams as occurred during the floods of winter 1995-1996. At that time, even though many of those roads were unused and were revegetated with brush and young trees – the roads were unstable and failed. The resulting landslides delivered large amounts of sediment to the streams below. Reestablishing the contour in the current project is designed to preclude a similar result to that of the 1995-1996 winter floods.

Forestwide management direction related to the project can be found on pages II-5 and II-24 of the Forest Plan:

Forest Plan Objective

Wildlife and Fish - Restore selected, presently degraded fish habitat through habitat improvement projects designed to achieve stated objectives (See Water Quality Standards and Management Area M2).

Forest Plan Standard

Wildlife and Fish - Cooperate with Idaho Fish and Game, Indian tribes, and other agencies in the management of wildlife and fish habitat.

The Project is located in Management Areas E1 and M2. Management direction for E1 (Forest Plan, p. III-57 to III-59) and M2 (Forest Plan, pp. III-68 to III-73) include:

Management Area E1

Goals - Provide optimum, sustained production of wood products....Manage a range of water quality and fish habitat potential from high fishable in several of the key anadromous and resident fish streams…

Water and Soil Standard – Utilize best management practices and meet water quality standards as defined in the Forestwide standards and Appendix K.

Management Area M2

Goal - Manage under the principles of multiple use as areas of special consideration, distinctive values, and integrated with adjacent management areas to the extent that water and other riparian dependent resources are protected.

Water and Soil Goals – Conduct watershed and stream improvements that will: 1) Enhance riparian and water resources; 2) Rehabilitate and/or mitigate the adverse effects of fire, flood, and other natural or management related causes.

Water and Soil Standard – Meet Forestwide water quality standards.

Decision

I have decided to approve the Big Basin Spur Roads Decommissioning project with the following terms and conditions:

The Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forest, in partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe's Watershed Division, proposes to decommission and recontour up to 5.6 miles of non-system harvest legacy roads. Access to the project area is from Highway 12 via Forest Roads 369 (Beaver Ridge Road) and 369B. The Forest Roads are accessible by most passenger cars but are recommended for high clearance vehicles only.

Using heavy equipment, a contractor would clear the roads of vegetation, decompact and inboard ditch the road, then recontour the road by pulling up the fill slope and reshaping the ground close to its original contour. In addition, the operator would clump plant native vegetation on the recontoured slopes, and pull duff and organic material from the adjacent uphill side to enhance revegetation. When completed, the decommissioned roads would no longer be accessible by vehicles; an opening at the top of the road cut-slope would be left to allow foot access.

Where the roads cross streams, the excavator operator would remove the existing culvert (log or metal), reestablish the grade of the stream, and where necessary, construct log or rock grade control structures in the stream bed to mimic a typical step-pool stream system found in the area. In areas where subsurface flow has been interrupted and caused ponding and soil saturation, the contractor would excavate a shallow depression to ensure drainage, then plant appropriate wet-site vegetation perpendicular to the flow path to help reestablish subsurface flow.

Clump planting and scattering the slash on the road would help limit surface erosion and provide microsites for revegetation and reestablish of a native plant community. In addition, invasive plants would be treated before and after the decommissioning. The decommissioned roads would be monitored for infestations and treated accordingly.

Any required permits for disturbance of water or wetlands would be obtained prior to initiating work (Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit, Idaho Department of Water Resources Stream Alteration Permit).

BMPs for water quality would be applied to maintain slope stability, and minimize soil disturbance from road decommissioning work. In addition, clump planting and scattering the removed vegetation (slash) on the recontoured surface would help limit erosion and provide microsites for revegetation. BMPs for invasive plant management (e.g., equipment cleaning and inspection) would be implemented to reduce the threat of non-native invasive species (plants) establishment and/or increase on the recontoured roads. The roads would be treated for invasive plants before decommissioning, and monitored, post-decommissioning, for weed infestations and treated accordingly.

Mechanical support would follow BMPs for fuel storage and fueling to minimize the risk of a fuels spill into live water. The contractor would have fuel spill containment supplies onsite in the event of a fuel spill and their employees would be trained in the proper application and use of those materials.

Road treatments would include the following design features and mitigation measures:

1. Any hardened road segment or surface area shall be de-compacted to promote water infiltration and establish vegetation.
2. After required decompaction of the roadway, the fill material shall be pulled up and placed on the roadbed between the top of cutslope and original ground forming a slope approximating natural contours. No ditches, water traps, or berms shall remain, nor any structures that require maintenance.
3. Log or metal culverts, other drainage structures and associated fills shall be removed from stream channels, followed by restoring channels to natural grade and sideslope contour.
4. Vegetation shall be preserved and placed on top of re-contoured road segments and completed channel side slopes in stable positions not interfering with stream channel flow.
5. Roughness and diversity elements shall be added at culvert removal sites, such as rock or log weirs, rootwads and live plant transplants to dissipate energy and support channel grade and bank stability in the newly restored stream channels.
6. All seeps and springs encountered shall have drainage channels or swales provided.
7. Clumps of available vegetation and associated soil shall be transplanted onto disturbed areas for erosion protection and long-term site productivity.
8. The disturbed area shall be 40% to 60% covered with natural slash when available from roadway.
9. Decommissioning activities shall be coordinated to avoid impacting fish spawning windows and locations.
10. A narrow (2' wide) break in slash and woody debris would remain at the top edge of the decommissioned road to accommodate foot and wildlife traffic.
11. At completion, the decommissioned roads would no longer require maintenance and would not be accessible to motorized vehicles.

The following design features would be used to minimize sediment delivery and other impacts to streams during culvert removal and road decommissioning:

1. Work during wet conditions shall cease if rutting and erosion cannot be controlled. Prior to leaving the site, any rutted areas and other damaged areas shall be smoothed, sloped and graded to drain, and all erosion control features shall be constructed and functional.
2. When working adjacent to live water or streams a buffer of vegetation, a brush barrier, or straw dike would be maintained to prevent direct sedimentation to the stream.
3. Stream diversions or dewatering would be required while work is being done in the channel. Settling basins or other methods would be used to ensure that muddy water does not return to the stream. Diversions would be installed, operated and removed such that erosion and sedimentation is minimized.
4. Fill material would be placed in stable areas outside of stream channels and floodplains.
5. The contractor would dispose of removed culverts and other structural materials off National Forest System land.
6. Prior to arriving at the project site, equipment used for instream work shall be cleaned of external oil, grease, dirt, mud, plant parts, and any leaks would be repaired. This cleaning would remove all dirt and plant parts to ensure that noxious weeds and aquatic invasive species are not brought to the site. All equipment would be inspected by the COR before unloading at site. Equipment would be inspected daily for leaks or accumulations of grease, and identified problems corrected before entering streams or areas that drain directly to streams or wetlands.
7. Mechanical support would follow BMPs for fuel storage and machine fueling to minimize the risk of a fuels spill into live water. The contractor would have fuel spill containment supplies onsite in the event of a fuel spill and their employees would be trained in the proper application and use of those materials.

Project Implementation: This project would begin during the 2018 (or 2019) work season, and is anticipated to take a year or less to complete.

III. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

A. Category of Exclusion and Rationale for Using the Category

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined for 36 CFR 220.6(e)(20): *Activities that restore, rehabilitate, or stabilize lands occupied by roads and trails, excluding National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails, to a more natural condition that may include removing, replacing, or modifying drainage structures and ditches, reestablishing vegetation, reshaping natural contours and slopes, reestablishing drainage-ways, or other activities that would restore site productivity and reduce environmental impacts.*

The rationale for my decision is based on: (1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, (2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, (3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, discussed below, (4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, including the Forest Plan, and (5) my review of the Biological Assessments (BA), Biological Evaluations (BE), specialists' reports, and project record.

B. Finding of the Absence of Significant Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

Additionally, 36 CFR 220.6(b) states, "*The mere presence of one of more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.*"

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species.

The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist and Botanist have determined the project would have no significant effects to federally listed and R1 Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species and/or their habitats. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

2. Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

Floodplains and wetlands exist in the project; however, no significant effects to these resources are proposed or expected for this project. Designated municipal watersheds do not exist in the project area, thus there will be no effects to the resource. Overall net benefits to watershed, soil and aquatic resources are expected with this project.

The proposed project is consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws because project design criteria and best management practices (BMPs) have been included to protect water resources. The activities are consistent with soil and water standards in the Clearwater National Forest Plan, including the PACFISH amendment. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas.

The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

4. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

The project area is not located in any inventoried or potential wilderness areas, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.

5. Research Natural Areas.

The project area is not located in any research natural area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.

6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites.

Because of previous adequate inventory; or the type, location or nature of the undertaking - the Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has determined the above project has little likelihood to adversely affect historic properties. As a result, a *No Inventory Decision* has been made, and no extraordinary circumstances identified to these resources.

7. Archaeological sites or historical properties or areas.

The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, or the Forest Archaeologist via the use of the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement, has determined that no archaeological or historic property will be adversely affected by this project. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

IV. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

On September 29, 2017, letters providing information and seeking public comment were mailed to individuals, organizations, a variety of state and local agencies, and the Nez Perce Tribe. Additionally, project information was also available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/ nezperce under NEPA projects. Two individuals/organizations during the public comment period, and their comments are addressed in Appendix A. The original letters are available in the project record.

V. Findings Required by Other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the Big Basin Spur Roads Decommissioning Project is consistent with applicable Federal, state and local laws and regulations, including the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Jeff Chynoweth, Small NEPA Team Coordinator, c/o Nez Perce-Clearwater NFs Supervisor's Office, 903 Third Street, Kamiah, Idaho 83536; 208-935-4260 or FAX 208-935-4275.

VII. Signature of Deciding Officer

11-7-2017

BRANDON KNAPTON
District Ranger
Lochsa-Powell District Ranger

Date

cc: Rebecca Lloyd, Anne Connor

Enclosures (1): Map

Map of the Big Basin Spur Roads Decommissioning Project